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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a longitudinal survey that gathered information on the number and types of challenges to curriculum and services in the California public schools. Data were collected from a questionnaire sent by the Board of Directors of the Educational Congress of California to every school-district superintendent in the state in 1990, 1991, and 1993. Sixty percent of the superintendents responding in 1993 indicated that challenges to curriculum had occurred in their districts. The challengers usually asked school districts to completely end the use of material or services (68 percent), rather than request that their children be excused from using the material (3 percent). Concerns about religious conflict or satanic/witchcraft issues accounted for 50 percent of the 1993 challenges, an increase of 9 percentage points since 1990. The vast majority of challenges were contentious and disruptive. In both the 1991 and 1993 surveys, administrators said that they would be less likely to adopt material challenged elsewhere or would not consider objects of controversy in other districts. Finally, 5 percent of the 1993 challenges came from school board members. Twenty-two tables are included. Appendices contain lists of the objects of challenges, challenging groups, professional resources, a sample board policy and administrative regulations, a copy of the questionnaires, and information on the Educational Congress of California. (LMI)

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# CURRICULUM CHALLENGES IN CALIFORNIA

## Third Statewide Survey of Challenges to Curriculum Materials and Services

1993

by

**Louise Adler, Ph.D.**
**California State University, Fullerton**

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Most importantly, this research depends on the cooperation of administrators in school districts who responded to the questionnaires and sent in copies of board policies, news articles, and board minutes.

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# HIGHLIGHTS

- 68% of challengers ask that school districts completely end use of the challenged material or service.
- 60% of responding districts have experienced curriculum challenges.
- The number of districts reporting challenges increased by five percentage points between the 1991 and 1993 data.
- 39% of the responding districts reported challenges during the 1991–1992 and 1992–93 school years.
- 44% of the challenges were at elementary school sites in the 1993 data.
- Concerns about religious conflict or satanic/witchcraft issues account for 50% of the challenges in the 1993 data.
- 77% of the responding districts indicated that they have a board policy for dealing with curriculum challenges.
- Only 11% of the districts reported in 1993 that they removed the challenged material or ended the challenged service.
- Organized groups were identified by the challengers as supporters or participants in 35% of the challenges.
- 93% of responding administrators indicated that they knew about challenges in other districts.
- Only 12% of responding administrators indicated that challenges they heard about were handled routinely with little controversy.
- 9% of the districts reported that (a) they would be less likely to adopt material challenged elsewhere, (b) might not consider items known to have caused contentious challenges, or (c) would not consider such materials.

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# CURRICULUM CHALLENGES IN CALIFORNIA 1993

*Schools shouldn't be battlegrounds over values. In fact, they should be the meeting ground, the common ground. Schools should be helping parents raise children with strong, positive values. This can and does happen where educators and school boards are doing their jobs.*

John Merrow, "Don't Offend': Our High-Level Policy of Cowardice," Education Week, Feb. 16, 1994, p. 42.

[A local board member] *recently appeared on two radio talk shows and said schools in* [her] *district and throughout the county are teaching about Satanism, levitation, secular humanism and the occult. The other four trustees criticized* [her] *for making the statements, which they called unsubstantiated and improper because she did not give the district an opportunity to investigate the claims.*

Local newspaper report about a community where the schools have become a battleground over "New Age teaching."

## MEETING GROUND OR BATTLEGROUND?

The battles taking place in California public schools have been reported on national television news shows and in major newspapers across the country. John Merrow who is the executive editor of "The Merrow Report" on public-television discussed the impact of these battles on the school districts which attempt to take a middle position and avoid giving offense. He concluded that a retreat from controversy will only result in raising children who are afraid of ideas and become "ignorant, easily led adults" (Merrow, p. 42). However, the vast majority of people who challenge material (97% in the data collected in 1993) left districts no middle ground because they wanted to restrict material or remove material from use by all children rather than asking only that their child not use the material. Thus, the challenges are not simply an exercise in parental influence over their own child, but an attempt to remove from use by all students material considered controversial by a limited number of challengers.

**Table 1**

*What did the challenger ask the school district to do when the challenge originated?*

| | |
|---|---|
| 3% | Excuse their child from using the material or service. |
| 18% | Restrict use of the material or service. |
| 11% | Revise or edit out "objectionable sections." |
| 68% | Completely end use of the material or service. |

In the fall of 1989, the Board of Directors of the Educational Congress of California decided to explore what was really happening in school districts around California by funding the printing and distribution of a questionnaire sent to every school district superintendent in the

State. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather accurate information on the number and types of challenges to curriculum and services in California public schools. The first questionnaire was distributed in the spring of 1990. A second survey was done in 1991. This report is based on data collected when the survey was done for a third time in 1993 and compares the data collected in all three years.

It must be noted that throughout this report each data collection represents two school years. Thus, the data collected in 1993 is for both 1991-92 and 1992-93 school years. Data has been collected in two year blocks because challenges do not fit neatly into a single school year. Challenges may take many months to be resolved.

The purpose of collecting data over a period of years is to explore whether there are changes or patterns. If the phenomenon being studied is stable, the data would not show changes in magnitude but would be constant. Most of the data for each year of the study is presented as percentages of the total sample. In discussing changes in magnitude between the years, the difference in percentages is used rather than the absolute numbers in most cases. Additionally, some new questions have been added to the survey form in response to suggestions from the field, other researchers, and reporters.

## WHO RESPONDED

Three hundred and thirteen districts in California responded to the survey in 1993. Districts from all of California's counties responded. The largest returns were from Los Angeles (49 districts), Orange (18), San Diego (23), Santa Clara (16) and San Bernardino (17) counties. In 1990, 421 districts responded and in 1991, 379. The 1993 response represents approximately one-third of the districts in the state. Some districts that had participated in the past noted that because of budget cuts they no longer completed "non-mandatory" surveys. Also due to budget restrictions the survey forms where mailed in 1993 using "bulk rate" rather than first class mail which could also have impacted the return rate.

The districts that responded to the questionnaire were fairly representative of the districts statewide. The size of the student population (ADA) of the districts that responded matched closely with the statewide percentages. (See Table 2.) However, smaller districts are under represented in the sample. It may be that these districts lacked the administrative support to respond to the questionnaire or that most concerns about curriculum are managed informally and thus not reported in this study. All types of districts responded to the survey--elementary, high school, and unified districts. (See table 3.)

The questionnaires were sent to the superintendents in two parts (see appendix page 33-38). The District Report form contained 12 questions used to determine (a) whether a district had received challenges; (b) the perceptions as to whether in comparison to other years there were more, less or about the same number of challenges; and (c) what they knew about and how they responded to challenges in other districts. In addition, a Challenge Report form was to be completed for each specific challenge. One hundred forty-three Challenge Reports were returned. However, not every district that reported having challenges on the District Report form filled out the Challenge Reports. Data taken only from the Challenge Reports are noted

throughout this report. All other data comes from the Districts Reports.

**Table 2**
SIZE OF DISTRICTS RESPONDING
COMPARED TO STATEWIDE DATA

| SIZE OF ADA | STATEWIDE 1993-94* | 1993 DATA |
|---|---|---|
| over 40,000 | 1% | 8% |
| 10,001-40,000 | 12% | 21% |
| 5,001-10,000 | 11% | 20% |
| 2,501- 5,000 | 13% | 13% |
| 501- 2,500 | 31% | 23% |
| under 500 | 32% | 15% |

* Source: EdSource, 1993-94

**Table 3**
TYPE OF DISTRICT RESPONDING

| TYPE OF DISTRICT | STATEWIDE 1993-94* | 1993 DATA | 1991 DATA | 1990 DATA |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| K-12 | 30% | 42% | 37.0% | 38.7% |
| K-6/8 | 59% | 46% | 51.6% | 51.9% |
| High School | 11% | 12% | 11.4% | 9.3% |

* Source: EdSource, 1993-94

**Table 4**
WHO REPORTED

| PERSON REPORTING | 1993 DATA |
|---|---|
| Superintendent | 42% |
| Assistant Super. | 24% |
| Other Dist. Office | 26% |
| Principal/Asst. Prin. | 6% |
| Other Dist. Employee | 2% |

Forty-two percent of the District Report forms were completed by superintendents and 50% were completed by other people who worked at the district offices. These results are similar to the results obtained in 1991.

## HOW MANY CHALLENGES

Sixty percent of the districts reported that there have been challenges at some time in their districts. This figure increased by five percentage points over the data reported in 1991 (55%). (See Table 5.) Thirty-nine percent of the districts reported that there have been challenges during the 1991-92 and 1992-93 school years. In 1990, 36% of the districts responding reported having challenges in 1988-89 and 1989-90. And in 1991, 44% of the districts reported challenges for 1989-90 and 1990-91. (See Table 6.)

**Table 5**
DISTRICTS THAT HAVE HAD CHALLENGES
AT SOMETIME IN THEIR HISTORY

| 1991 DATA | 1993 DATA |
|---|---|
| 55% | 60% |

**Table 6**
DISTRICTS THAT HAD CHALLENGES
DURING THE TWO YEARS SURVEYED

| 1990 DATA | 1991 DATA | 1993 DATA |
|---|---|---|
| 36% | 44% | 39% |

A 1981 study done by the Association of American Publishers (AAP, et. al.) reported rate of challenges to be lower than was found in this study:

> *More than one in five (22.4%) of the 1,891 respondents, overall --or nearly one administrator in five (19.2%) and nearly one librarian in three (29.5%)--reported that there had been some challenge to classroom or library materials in their school(s)* [between 1978-80].... (p.3)

Fifty-five percent of the districts reporting in 1993 received more than one challenge. (See Table 7.) This was also the case in the data collected in 1990 and 1991. The McAfee-Hopkins (a professor at University of Wisconsin-Madison) research on school libraries covering 1987 to 1990 showed *"the majority of those reporting complaints, or 51.8%, reported one complaint, and 73.7% reported one or two complaints"* (1991, p. 135). The 1993 data reported here shows a similar rate. Seventy-two percent of those districts reporting challenges reported one or two challenges in their district.

**Table 7**

NUMBER OF CHALLENGES PER DISTRICT

| Number of Challenges Per District | % of Districts Receiving this Number of Challenges 1990 Data | % of District Receiving this Number of Challenges 1991 Data | % of Districts Receiving this Number of Challenges 1993 Data |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 43% | 49.1% | 45% |
| 2 | 27% | 21.8% | 27% |
| 3 | 9% | 13.0% | 12% |
| 4 | 9% | 6.8% | 5% |
| 5 | 4% | 3.1% | 2% |
| 6+ | 8% | 6.2% | 9% |

The number of challenges per district appears to be relatively stable over the years data were collected for this longitudinal study. In all three surveys, over fifty percent of the districts reporting challenges received more than one challenge. On the other hand, the total number of challenges when compared to the number of districts reporting showed a dramatic increase in the data collected in 1991 (Table 8). This may reflect the fact that (a) there were a number of challenges to the Impressions reading series reported in the 1991 data, and (b) districts where the Impressions series was challenged were more likely than other districts to report having multiple challenges.

**Table 8**

Total Number of Challenges Reported

| | 1990 | 1991 | 1993 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of district reporting | 421 | 379 | 313 |
| Total number of challenges | 320 | 374 | 232 |
| Number of challenges as a percentage of districts reporting * | 76% | 98% | 74% |

* NOTE: this does not mean that this is the percent of districts having challenges.

It must also be noted that the challenges reported in these data were reported by district office level personnel. Some challenges do not come to the attention of district office personnel because they are resolved at school sites. Public school officials do not usually classify casual

questions and concerns expressed by parents as formal challenges. Therefore, it should not be assumed that these data represent all of the challenges and concerns that are a part of the day-to-day business of schools. The AAP (1981) study reported that half or more of the challenges were dealt with informally by districts.

The AAP (1981) study reported *"challenges occurred with increasing frequency at higher grade levels"* (p. 4). Data for the three surveys done in this study show an opposite trend with more challenges occurring at the lower grade levels (see Table 9). The 1991 data showed a much higher number of challenges at the elementary level, probably reflective of the challenges to the Impressions elementary reading series. The smaller sample size for the Challenge Report forms (143) does make conclusions based on these data somewhat more speculative.

**Table 9**
TYPE OF SCHOOL SITE WHERE CHALLENGES OCCURRED
Challenge Report Data

| Site of Challenge | % of Challenges 1993 Data | % of Challenges 1991 Data | % of Challenges 1990 Data* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Elementary | 44.4% | 60.7% | 44.5% |
| Junior High | 29.3% | 13.7% | 7.0% |
| High School | 24.1% | 14.5% | 19.5% |
| District Wide | 2.3% | 11.1% | 21.1% |

*Note additional 1990 data: 7-12 1.6%, Unsure .8%.

## WHAT GETS CHALLENGED

Each district was asked what types of curriculum or services were challenged during the 1991-92 and 1992-93 school years. Library books and textbooks were the most commonly challenged type of materials or services. (See Table 10.) As in the 1990 and 1991 data the Impressions reading series was the most challenged item reported in the 1993 survey. In addition, a small number of districts also reported challenges to the new elementary social science textbooks from Houghton Mifflin. (See Appendix One. For further information on Houghton Mifflin challenges see Adler & Tellez, 1993.) The data collected in 1991 showed textbooks were more likely to be challenged than library books. However, the 1990 and 1993 data showed textbooks and library books about equal in the number of challenges. Conversely, the AAP study covering 1978-1980 showed challenges to textbooks were 11.5% of the sample whereas challenges to contemporary fiction were 36.8% of the challenges (p. 4).

It would seem that districts are not protected from criticism by purchasing State adopted textbooks since 25% of the challenges were to materials that have been approved by the State Board of Education or approved by both the local and State Board. (See Table 11.)

**Table 10**

TYPES OF CHALLENGES BY NUMBER OF CHALLENGES PER DISTRICT

| | | Number of Challenges per District | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TYPE OF CHALLENGES | TOTAL | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7+ |
| Textbooks | 35 | 27 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Library Books | 38 | 27 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Other Material/Serv. | 33 | 28 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Curriculum Guide | 14 | 12 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Film | 21 | 18 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Class Discussion/Lecture | 18 | 15 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Counselor Services | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Psychologist Services | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Nursing Services | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

**Table 11**

HOW CHALLENGED MATERIAL OR SERVICES WAS ADOPTED

Challenge Report Form Data

| ADOPTED BY | % 1993 DATA | % 1991 DATA | % 1990 DATA |
|---|---|---|---|
| State Board | 13% | 33.3% | 13.9% |
| Local Board | 35% | 34.3% | 23.0% |
| Neither | 40% | 32.4% | 51.5% |
| Both | 12% | not used | 11.5% |

## WHAT IS THE TREND

When districts that had challenges at any time (59.6% of all those reporting) were asked, *"Does it seem to you that your district is experiencing: the same number of challenges as in past years, more challenges than in past years, or fewer challenges than in past years?"* the majority of districts reporting challenges replied, *"the same."* (See Table 12.) The most recent comparable data gathered by AAP indicated that *"of 176 respondents indicating a change in the rate of challenges during the 1978-80 period covered by the survey, as compared to the 1976-78 period, 131 reported the recent rate as 'higher,' while only 45 indicated 'lower'"* (AAP, et. al., 1981, p. 9).

One coordinator of instructional media who responded this year indicated that, *"the 'religious-right' has increased in the intensity of its challenges while reasonableness has decreased."* (Please note that none of the citations for quotations from this survey's data are

provided to protect the anonymity of those reporting the data. However, the type of person or source is described.)

**Table 12**
DISTRICT PERCEIVED CHANGES IN NUMBER OF CHALLENGES

| TREND | 1993 DATA | 1991 DATA | 1990 DATA |
|---|---|---|---|
| "same number" | 54% | 49.49% | 67.80% |
| "more challenges" | 18% | 34.18% | 23.30% |
| "fewer challenges" | 28% | 16.33% | 8.90% |

There was a change in how this question was asked beginning in 1991 which may account for some of the shifts in the data. In any case, the vast majority of districts are reporting either the same number of challenges or more challenges in all three surveys.

## WHY CURRICULUM OR SERVICES ARE CHALLENGED

The 1990 survey asked those reporting to list the reasons for challenges. The responses were then grouped under general categories based on the responses from districts. These categories were listed on the 1991 and 1993 questionnaires, and respondents checked the categories that applied to the challenges in their districts. The most frequently cited reasons for challenges were *"Religious conflict"* and *"Satanic/witchcraft."* The trend appears to be that these two categories account for an increasing number of the challenges (increasing by almost ten percentage points from the 1990 to 1993 data). In response to a question that asked for the title of the object of the challenge, the most common theme connecting the challenged items was *witches, mythology, and the occult*. The next most important theme was challenges to *health education, family life programs, HIV/AIDS,* and *sex education*. (See Appendix One.)

**Table 13**
% OF REASONS CITED FOR CHALLENGES

| REASON FOR CHALLENGE | 1993 DATA | 1991 DATA | 1990 DATA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Religious Conflict | 30% | 21.88% | 17.0% |
| Satanic/Witchcraft | 20% | 19.67% | 23.7% |
| Violence/Profanity | 3% | 14.40% | 12.6% |
| Controversial | 11% | 13.85% | 11.9% |
| Too Sexual | 17% | 11.08% | 13.3% |
| Not Age Appropriate | 7% | 9.42% | 11.9% |
| Out of Date/Poor Role Model | 3% | 6.65% | 1.5% |
| Offensive to Minority | 9% | 3.05% | 8.1% |

The most recent comparable data was collected in the 1977 National Council of Teachers of English study in which it was found that the most common reason for an objection was

language which might include grammar, dialect, or use of profanity or obscenity. The next most common reason for objections was to sex, or *"erotic qualities in the books"* (Burress, 1979, p. 17). The research done by Fiske (from UC Berkeley) in the 1950's found politics to be the primary reason for challenges in school libraries followed closely by sex/obscenity and then profanity. Though these categories of challenges (except politics) were found in the current study, they are not the most significant reasons for challenges.

The groups identified as supporters or participants in the challenge as reported on the survey forms are listed in the Appendix Two. The vast majority of these groups or individuals are related to religion such as specific churches or groups that are religiously based. Terms such as *religious-right* and *fundamentalist church* were used by administrators in their responses. In addition, groups identified with the politically-active extreme called "impact evangelists" were identified such as Citizens for Excellence in Education. The concerns about schools of these groups can be summarized into three broad categories that could be stated in the words of challengers as:

- "If it was good enough for me--it's good enough for my kids."
- "Kids don't need to solve moral problems--they are told how to do it in the Bible."
- "No expert from a godless university is going to come here and tell me what is good for my kid." (Adler and Tellez, 1992, p. 156-7.)

California Learning Assessment System/CLAS Tests

For the first time two districts reported challenges to the State testing program which is now called the CLAS. One district indicated that the reason for the challenge to the content of the CLAS tests was that the challenger was *"concerned about reflecting on student feelings, opinions, student challenges to established beliefs."* A school board member in another district made a speech at a church in 1993 during which she indicated her concerns with the CLAS test:

> *This really violates privacy, and it's subjective and psychological in nature....*
>
> *...It asks students what their ethnic background is, their parents' level of education, how many hours they watch TV.... What happens to this information? This information is keypunched into a databank. And when you see the national output of the input that's done on a local basis, it would scare you to death. Because from the information off of these sheets, they can gain all the medical information on your student, all their insurance information, all the information on the family...whether the kid has ever had a drug problem, whether the kid has been in the hospital for what kind of diseases. There isn't anything that they can't find out.... This is very frightening because it even gets down and scores your child on their level of honesty, integrity, their ability to adapt to change.... It is total invasion of privacy.*
>
> *A fourth-grade-level test absolutely blew my mind.... One of the tests asked the*

*student, "We've all encountered a parent who won't let us do something that we want to do. Write a paragraph persuading your parent to let you do something that they previously wouldn't let you do." There's all kinds of circumstances like that throughout every single one of these tests that I've looked at. So it's not an isolated incidence. There is an agenda to try to take the parental authority away, in my opinion.*

Some months later this same school board member participated in a meeting for parents in a neighboring county where according to a newspaper account:

*The speakers cited examples of tests in other districts statewide in which students were asked questions on topics ranging from sexual activity to race issues. "One question on the California Learning Assessment System test, administered in districts throughout the state asked if students would eliminate an entire race and if so, which one," said* [the board member], *who serves on an education task force established by Assemblyman....*

Science Curriculum v. Creationism

The long saga of the confrontation in the Vista Unified School district over creationism has been reported in all of the major newspapers and on TV. However several other districts reported challenges related to their science curriculum and textbooks. Like the controversy over the CLAS tests, in this controversy school board members have taken on the role of challengers. In another district Citizens for Excellence in Education supported a teacher who was described in a news article as,

*...a self-proclaimed born-again Christian* [who] *stayed firm in his position that evolution theory is flawed.*

*It's the administrators who believe evolution should be taught as fact. They're frustrated by my methods and I'm discriminated against because of my religion.*

On the opposing side are the scientists and educators who uphold the State Science Framework.

*The vast majority of the scientific community considered the debate so irrevocably resolved that it's difficult to even get most scientists interested in the issue. Challenged on the theory of evolution...scientist "act as if we are asking them to defend the fact that the sun came up this morning.*

Eugenie Scott, executive director of the National Center for Scientific Education in Berkeley (McDonald, 1989, p. A1).

*Evolution is the central organizing theory of biology and has fundamental*

> *importance in other sciences as well. It is an accepted scientific explanation and therefore no more controversial in scientific circles than the theories of gravitation and electron flow.* (California State Science Framework, p. 21)
>
> *Teachers should be aware that the theory of evolution has been tested and refined over a hundred years and that the majority of criticisms that find their way into popularly circulated publications have not been validated scientifically; usually, the criticisms have been evaluated and rejected by the scientific community.... The particular case of "creation science" (or "scientific creationism") has been thoroughly studied by the leading scientific societies and rejected as not qualifying as a scientific explanation.* (California State Science Framework, p. 24)

Religious Objections to Material Seen as Promoting Witchcraft

A comparison of the books challenged in 1993 with the lists from previous years shows that books by well known authors such as Blume, Dahl, Bradbury, Steinbeck, Salinger, and Twain are challenged again and again over the years. Frequently, these books are on the Recommended Readings in Literature list that is published by the California State Department of Education. A common theme in many of the challenges is religious objections to material that is seen as promoting witchcraft or evil. An individual who was identified in a newspaper article as a member of Concerned American Roman Catholics spoke at a school board meeting in support of a challenge to The Great Santini: *"I'm against all books that are devilish and evil and does [sic] not lead children to Jesus and into heaven."* In a similar manner, Eric Buehrer (1990), who was an officer in Robert Simonds', Citizens for Excellence in Education, indicated that:

> *Christian parents need to also teach their children to arm themselves against the presence of demons on school campuses. The Bible clearly teaches that we are constantly in a sea of spiritual activity swirling all around us. This angelic conflict is intensified by teachers invoking the presence of spirit guides and mystical experiences. However, a child empowered by Gold's Holy Spirit can by prayer literally save an entire classroom of children from demonic oppression. The presence of these gentle, Christian warriors can do much in the battlefield of spiritual warfare.* (The New Age Masquerade: p. 108)

One book challenged for religious reasons is Katherine Paterson's, Bridge to Terabithia, which had multiple challenges reported in 1991 and 1993. Recommended Readings in Literature, K–8, (1989) notes that this book is part of the core literature books for grades 5 to 8 which are to be *"taught in the classroom, are given close reading and intensive consideration, are likely to be an important stimulus for writing and discussion"* (p. xi). The State Department says that the children in the book, *"reign supreme in a magical kingdom that Leslie creates until the tragedy of her death...."* (p. 33). This special place is described by Leslie in the book as, *"'a whole secret country,...and you and I would be the rulers of it.... It could be a magic country like Narnia, and the only way you can get in is by swinging across on this enchanted rope'.... Leslie named their secret land 'Terabithia'"* (p. 38–39). Later when a storm breaks while the children are visiting Terabithia, Leslie says, *"Let us go even up into the sacred grove and inquire of the Spirits what this evil might be and how we must combat it. For of a truth I perceive that this is no ordinary rain that is falling upon our kingdom"* (p. 91). Nothing magical ever actually happens in the book except in the imaginations of the two main characters (and perhaps in the imaginations of the children who read the book).

Various books by Roald Dahl have been reported as challenged such as James and the Giant Peach (which is on the State list of Recommended Readings) and The Witches. A Reading is Fundamental poll conducted in 1990 (Education Week, 10/24/90) found Dahl to be one of children's most favorite authors. In The Witches, which was challenged in both the 1991 and 1993 data, a young boy and his grandmother visit a seaside town in England where there happens to be a convention of witches who are planning how to turn all children into mice under the direction of the Grand High Witch:

> *"'So each of you is owning a magnificent sweet shop! The next move is that each of you vill be announcing in the vindow or your shop that on a certain day you vill be having a Great Galla Opening vith frrree sweets and chocs to every child!' 'That will bring them in, the greedy little brutes!' cried the audience. 'They'll be fighting to get through the doors!' 'Next,' continued the Grand High Witch, 'you vill...fill every choc...vith my very latest and grrreatest magic formula! This is known as FORMULA 86 DELAYED-ACTION MOUSE-MAKER!'"* (p. 77-78)

While there are chills and thrills a plenty for a young readers' imaginations in Dahl's book, it is unlikely that any child would actually believe from reading the book that witches really exist or are to be liked or emulated.

## WHO CHALLENGES

In 1990 the questionnaire asked, *"Who are the challengers (parents, community members, non-residents, special interest group members, etc.)? Please be as specific as possible,"* and left blank lines for answers. (See Table 14.) The answers were grouped into categories which were used as the basis for this question on the 1991 and 1993 questionnaires. Again in 1993, parents were the majority of challengers (55%).

**Table 14**
WHO CHALLENGES
Challenge Report Data

| WHO CHALLENGES | % 1993 DATA | % 1991 DATA | % 1990 DATA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parents | 55% | 45.96% | 65.24% |
| Religious Group | 13% | 17.44% | 13.37% |
| Special Interest Group | 7% | 8.94% | 6.42% |
| Community Members | 13% | 5.32% | 4.81% |
| Non Residents | 4% | 5.11% | 3.21% |
| Teacher/Board Member | 6.5%* | 5.10% | 3.72% |
| Other Employee | 1.5% | not used | not used |
| No Response | not used | not used | 3.21% |

* Teacher = 1.5%, Board Member = 5%.

Since the questionnaire in 1991 and 1993 listed possible responses rather than providing blank lines as was the case in 1990, shifts in the percentages could be expected. However, the

relative order of the responses has remained the same with parents being the most likely challengers and religious groups and special interest groups being the next most likely challengers. It should also be noted that more than one category could be checked. Therefore, it is possible that the categories overlap to some degree. For example, some of the parents who were challengers could also be part of a religious group involved in a challenge.

The most recent comparable data gathered by McAfee-Hopkins also showed parents as the most likely initiators of challenges (64% of the challenges reported). However, there is a very interesting difference in the two data sets. The McAfee-Hopkins data showed that *"nearly 20% of the challenges came from principals and teachers"* (Survey Finds..., 1992, p. 2). In an earlier article she discussed an article by Woodworth and a study done by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction that,

> *found that schools showed a tendency to resist censorship attempts from outside the system and acquiesce to similar efforts inside the system...Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction studies found that the selection policy was less likely to be followed when an administrator, teacher, or school board member questioned materials, but that when organized groups, parents, or students challenged materials, the policy was more often followed"*
> (McAfee Hopkins, 1989, p. 267)

While this research found a small percentage of challenges by teachers and board members, no challenges by principals were reported. Only 24% of the persons who challenged as reported on the Challenge Report form had challenged school material or services in the past, meaning that for a large majority of the challengers this was their first experience as a challenger. The 1990 and 1991 data showed a similar percentages.

Several questions focused on the number of people involved in the challenges. Eighty percent of the challenges involved just one or two people, most likely the parents of a student. (See Table 15.)

Another question asked, *"How many people supported the challenge in writing or at a meeting?"* This was designed to determine the degree of support for the challenge. Eighty-seven percent of the challenges reported in 1993 had 10 or less people supporting them in writing or at a meeting. (See table 16.)

Eighteen percent of the challengers and supporters were identified by the districts as non residents. When non-residents were involved their numbers were generally small. Three or less people were involved 61% of the time.

**Table 15**
HOW MANY PEOPLE MADE THE INITIAL CHALLENGE
Challenge Report Data

| NUMBER MAKING INITIAL CHALLENGE | % of 1993 DATA | % OF 1991 DATA | % OF 1990 DATA |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 61% | 47.0% | 45.6% |
| 2 | 18% | 16.5% | 22.8% |
| 3-10 | 13% | 26.1% | 25.7% |
| 11-19 | 1.5% | 2.6% | 4.4% |
| 20+ | 5.5% | 7.8% | 1.5% |

Organized groups were identified by the challengers as supporters or participants in the challenge in 35% of challenges from the 1993 Report Forms. A variety of groups were identified ranging from the National Organization for Women to The National Rifle Association, however the majority of these groups were religious in nature. (See Appendix Two.) Another question asked whether the persons challenging referred to arguments or viewpoints developed by individuals or groups from outside the community. Twenty-nine percent of the districts completing Challenge Report forms indicated that there was such a reference to arguments from outside the community. The responses to this question also represented a wide range of groups and individuals, and two school districts were identified: San Marcos and Vista. (See Appendix Two. Please note that the names of districts reporting these data are not revealed, but the names of these two districts were given by other districts in response to a question.)

**Table 16**
NUMBER SUPPORTING THE CHALLENGE
Challenge Report Data

| NUMBER SUPPORTING | % 1993 DATA | % 1991 DATA | % 1990 DATA |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0-2 | 62% | 48.6% | 59.8% |
| 3-10 | 25% | 21.5% | 22.0% |
| 11-19 | 5% | .9% | 6.1% |
| 20+ | 8% | 29.0% | 12.1% |

## PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF CHALLENGES

The 1993 data showed that 31% of the challenges have been covered in the media; however, some challenges cause a great deal of coverage. More challenges were discussed at public board meetings than by the media, as was the case in data from prior surveys. However, many

challenges escape both types of public scrutiny. Additionally, most districts did not consult an attorney about the challenge(s) in their districts.

**Table 17**
VOLATILITY OF CHALLENGES
Challenge Report Data

| | % YES IN 1993 DATA | % YES IN 1991 DATA | % YES IN 1990 DATA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Covered by the media | 31% | 37.1% | 25% |
| Discussed in board meeting | 44% | 51.3% | 38% |
| Consulted an attorney | 20% | 28.1% | 26% |

## HOW DISTRICTS DEAL WITH CHALLENGES

Fifty percent of the districts responding in 1993 indicated that a district review committee was formed. In response to the question, *"At what level was the final decision on how to deal with the challenge made?"*, 18% indicated *"school site,"* 50% indicated *"district office,"* and 32% *"not applicable."* Since the survey was sent to the superintendents, it is not unusual that most decisions reported were made at the district level.

In the majority of cases a staff member of the district met with the challengers (74%). But it is somewhat less likely that they will ask the challenger to put their concerns in writing (58%). In addition, the challengers are now more likely to get a written response than they were in the data reported for 1990. The California School Boards Association model administrative regulation (AR 1312.2[a]) dealing with challenges notes that challenges should be made in writing. (See page 30 of this report.)

> *Complaints must be presented in writing to the principal. Complaints regarding printed material must name the author, title and publisher, and identify the objection by page and item numbers. In the case of nonprinted material, written information specifying the precise nature of the objection shall be given. The statement must be signed and identified in such a way that a proper reply will be possible.*

**Table 18**
STAFF RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES
Challenge Report Data

| ACTIONS OF THE DISTRICT | % YES 1993 DATA | % YES 1991 DATA | % YES 1990 DATA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Staff met with challengers | 74% | 72.4% | 69.6% |
| Staff requested concerns be in writing | 58% | 62.4% | 48.6% |
| Challengers received written response | 46% | 51.3% | 39.9% |

## POLICY

An assistant superintendent from northern California made a parenthetical note on the Challenge Report form that, *"the book was reviewed and found to be lacking in any real value as literature and had barely been accepted when screened as core literature. I read the book and agreed with the challenger."* He indicated that the steps that had been taken in response to the challenge were that the staff met with the challengers. Significantly, the boxes for indicating formation of a district review committee and requiring that the challenge be made in writing were not checked. That same district's policy for dealing with Complaints Concerning Instructional Materials states: *"All complaints must be presented in writing...." "The findings of the building review committee and/or the district review committee shall be summarized in a written report and be transmitted to the superintendent or designee, who will determine how interested parties shall be notified."* It would seem from the District's responses on the Challenge Report Form that the district did not follow their own board policy which was adopted in 1990.

The California School Boards Association Policy Service provides districts with model policies and administrative regulations for dealing with challenges. (See appendix for copies.) Establishing procedures before a district receives a challenge assures that all people who challenge can expect due process and a fair hearing as well as protecting the rights of students and staff members. Other organizations such as the California Teachers Association and California Media and Library Educators Association also provide assistance in dealing with challenges. (See appendix page 28.)

Seventy-seven percent of the districts report in 1993 that they have a challenge policy. But, when the districts without policies were asked *"do you intend to develop a policy?"* over 43% replied, *"No"*. In 1991 over 90% of the responding districts replied "no" to this question. In addition to those districts without policies, a further concern is whether districts actually use the policies they have adopted.

**Table 19**

Has your district used the challenge policy?

| | |
|---|---|
| 17% | Not applicable, we have no policy. |
| 29% | No, we have had no challenges. |
| 9% | No, we have had challenges but did not use the policy. |
| 45% | Yes, we have had challenges and used the policy. |

Of greatest concern in these responses is the 9% of districts that have policies but did not use them which is up from the 6.75% in this category in the 1991 data. A noted expert on school law, Martha McCarthy states that:

> *Once a process to evaluate complaints pertaining to the instructional program is in place, school boards should follow it carefully, as courts will show little sympathy when a school board ignores its own established procedures.* (1987, p. 85)

Those districts that report having challenge policies (52%–1993 data, 47%–1991 data) are likely to have reviewed or revised the content of their policy within the last two years. Twenty–five percent have reviewed or revised the policies within the last 5 years (19% in 1991 data). However, 23% reported *"Neither"* for this question in 1993.

A detailed analysis of over two hundred California school board policies for dealing with challenges collected in 1990 and 1991 was conducted to show the congruence of each district's policy to the provisions of model policies.

**Table 20**

Key Provisions Found in California Board Policies

Policies collected in 1990 & 1991

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Challenges must be made in writing. | 97% |
| 2. | Use of a form is specified. | 93% |
| 3. | Challengers must begin the process by discussing their concern with the principal of the school where the material is used. | 76% |
| 4. | A review committee can be appointed at the school site. | 47% |
| 5. | A review committee can be appointed at the district level. | 75% |
| 6. | Challenged material remains in use during review process. | 69% |
| 7. | There is an appeal process provided. | 54% |
| 8. | Standards used by the committee to review the challenged material are specified. | 57% |
| 9. | Standards establishing how often a challenged material will be reviewed with in a specific time period. | 4% |
| 10. | Guidelines for selection of review committee members are specified. | 51% |
| 11. | Alternate assignment may be given to challenger's child. | 46% |

(Source: Adler, 1992–93, p. 107)

Over half of the districts that had challenges received more than one which could be a challenge to the same item challenged earlier. It would be wise for districts to specify how often within a specific period they will review the same challenged material. An example might be that material would only be reconsidered once every three years. However, a review of the policies collected in 1993 indicates that only 18% of the districts now have a provision of this type in their policies.

It is surprising that librarians are represented on review committees only slightly more often than community members, even though their professional training usually prepares them to deal with controversial selection issues. This may be a reflection of the fact that close to half the challenges are at the elementary level where professional librarians are not likely to be employed. (See Table 21.)

## Table 21

Members of the Review Committee as Designated in Board Policies 1990 & 1991 Data

| | % of policies that specify this category |
|---|---|
| District office staff | 65% |
| Principals | 76% |
| Teachers | 80% |
| Librarians | 29% |
| Community Members | 20% |
| Parents | 17% |

# FINAL DECISIONS

Challengers got material or services removed from schools in only a very small percentage of the challenges (11% reported on Challenge Report forms). Selection and review procedures that never resulted in challenged material being removed would be hard to defend as fair and would assume that selection decisions were always correct. Conversely, if the decisions frequently resulted in the removal of challenged material or services it would call into question the professional judgment and academic freedom of the districts' staffs.

In comparing previous studies to the data from the '90, '91, and '93 surveys, it is difficult to discern an accurate trend from data gathered by different instruments surveying somewhat different populations. However, the California data presented here seems to show a lower tendency to remove material than was found in the prior research studies and a greater tendency to excuse the challenger's child from the use of the challenged material.

## Table 22

FINAL DISTRICT DECISION

Challenge Report Forms

| FINAL DECISION | % YES 1993 DATA * | % YES 1991 DATA * | % YES 1990 DATA * | % YES McAfee-Hopkins 1986-89** | % YES AAP, et. al. 1978-80 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Remove material/end service | 11% | 10% | 12% | 26.1% | 22.0% |
| Restrict use | 14% | 8% | 11% | 21.6% | ***6.2% |
| Continue to use | 34% | 37% | 32% | 52.3% | 34.6% |
| Continue/excuse challenger's child | 25% | 31% | 29% | NA | 8.5% |
| Other | 16% | 14% | 16% | NA | NA |

Notes * Columns do not add to 100% because a few districts wrote in other alternatives.

** Research applied to libraries only ("Survey Finds," 1992, p. 2).

*** 28.5% were others that were restrictive such as "not reordered" (Kamhi, 1981, p. 57).

The computations used in the 1990 and 1991 reports yielded slightly higher percentages than are reported here because of the use of a "pending" category. All of the data has been recalculated using the same process so that it can be accurately compared.

The two most likely decisions for districts responding to the three surveys in this study were to continue the use of the challenged material or service or to continue to use the challenged material or service but excuse the child of the challenger from use of the materials or services. Thus the most likely outcomes resulted in no change in the materials or services available to all of the children except those of the challengers.

## WHAT DID THE CHALLENGERS THINK

Because it is difficult to get data directly from challengers, we do not know exactly what they thought about the decisions made by the districts. In an attempt to begin to assess the way challengers might view the decisions made by the districts, we asked the administrators what they believe the challengers thought of the decisions that had been made. In response to a question added this year, administrators reported that the majority of challengers (51%) were not satisfied with the outcome of the challenge.

**Table 23**

*"How satisfied do you think the challengers were with the outcome?"*

Challenge Report Form Data 1993

| | |
|---|---|
| 18% | Very Satisfied |
| 33% | Somewhat Satisfied |
| 26% | Somewhat Dissatisfied |
| 23% | Very Dissatisfied |

A more detailed question has been a part of all three surveys: *"In your opinion what would challengers say about the outcome you have described?"* It is interesting that in response to this question only 28% of the challengers were considered *"satisfied"* by the administrators reporting in 1993. Each time the survey has been done this category has gotten smaller dropping 26 percentage points from the 1990 to 1993 data.

**Table 24**

REACTION OF CHALLENGERS TO DISTRICT DECISIONS

Challenge Report Form Data

| WHAT CHALLENGERS MIGHT SAY | % YES 1993 DATA | % YES 1991 DATA | % YES 1990 DATA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Satisfied | 28% | 43% | 54% |
| Got fair hearing/don't like outcome | 38% | 44% | 37% |
| No one listened/nothing changed/ district was nice | 14% | 17% | 7% |
| Treated badly/don't like outcome | 9% | 6% | 3% |
| We'll be back | 12% | 16% | 6% |
| We are taking our kids out of school | 5% | 15% | 7% |
| See you next election | 4% | 12% | 10% |

Note: More than one choice could be checked so the columns do not add to 100%. Other was used as a category by 10% of the districts in 1993. The computations used in the 1990 and 1991 reports yielded slightly higher percentages than are reported here because of the use of a "pending" category. All of the data has been recalculated using the same process so that it can be accurately compared.



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However, administrators did think that most challengers (66%) would say they were either satisfied or at least got a fair hearing in the 1993 data. Treating people fairly is a highly prized quality among educators so it is not surprising that they would report that most challengers were satisfied or got a fair hearing.

## ECHO EFFECT

The 1990 documentary data and discussions with administrators suggested that there was an *"echo effect"* in other districts that heard about particularly contentious challenges. Three questions were added to the 1991 and 1993 questionnaires to probe this area. Responses showed that in the 1991 data 94.8% of the administrators had read or heard about challenges in other districts, and in 1993, 93% reported hearing about other challenges. Only 12% reported in 1993 that the challenges were *"handled routinely with little controversy."* Instead the vast majority reported that the challenges were either *"somewhat or very disruptive."* (See Table 25.)

Districts were also asked how they were influenced by what they heard about challenges in other districts. The vast majority of districts reported that they plan the adoption process carefully to avoid controversies, but make their own independent judgement. Only 13% of the districts reporting in 1993 said that they were not influenced at all. Nine percent of the districts reported that (a) they would be less likely to adopt material challenged elsewhere, (b) might not consider items known to have caused contentious challenges, or (c) would not consider such materials. In this small group of districts influenced by the *"echo effect,"* material may not be used because of challenges in other districts. One Southern California district office staff member added a written note on the questionnaire: *"Please note that while we make independent judgements, challenges are causing us to be more conservative and take fewer risks."*

**Table 25**

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHALLENGES IN OTHER DISTRICTS

*How would you characterize what you remember hearing about these challenges in other districts? (Check appropriate answers.)*

| | 1993 DATA | 1991 DATA |
|---|---|---|
| "Challenges were handled routinely with little controversy." | 12% | 12% |
| "Challenges were somewhat contentious and disruptive." | 51% | 46% |
| "Challenges were very disruptive." | 25% | 40% |
| "Challenges caused community wide controversy." | 33% | Asked as one question in 1991. |
| "Other" | 2% | 2% |

Note: more than one answer could be checked so the numbers do not add to 100%.

**Table 22**

HOW DISTRICTS ARE INFLUENCED BY CHALLENGES IN OTHER DISTRICTS

| HOW ARE YOU INFLUENCED? | % 1993 DATA | % 1991 DATA | |
|---|---|---|---|
| We are not influenced at all. | 13% | 11.8% | |
| We are anxious that controversy does not occur in our district. | not used | 2.5% | |
| We plan adoption process carefully to avoid controversies, but we make our own independent judgement. | 78% | 76.7% | |
| We would consider items known to have caused contentious challenges elsewhere, but would be less likely we would adopt them. | 4% | 5.5% | ECHO EFFECT |
| We might not consider items known to have caused contentious challenges in other districts. | 3% | 3.0% | 9% |
| We would not consider adopting curriculum and/or services that caused contentious challenges in other districts. | 2% | .5% | |

The term "echo effect" has not been used by other researchers, but they did refer to the concept.

> *Despite the fact that one* [contentious challenge] *took place more than five years before this study was undertaken and the other well over three, the majority of respondents throughout the state not only knew of them but brought them into their discussions spontaneously. As we shall see, a number of both school and public libraries reacted to these conflicts with precautionary or restrictive measures.*
>
> (Fiske, 1959, p. 54).

> *...Comments indicate that some precensorship results from the "chilling effect" of previous controversy and the desire to avoid conflict.... Such comments provide evidence that the difficult-to-document phenomenon of precensorship does occur in our schools....* (AAP, 1981, p. 12)

# IMPLICATIONS OF MAJOR FINDINGS

## VOLATILITY OF CHALLENGES

Sixty percent of the districts responding in 1993 indicated that there had been challenges in their districts. The challengers usually ask school districts to completely end use of material or services (68%) rather than focusing only on requesting that their own child be excused from using the material (3%). Thus, the challengers are bound to be dissatisfied unless the district removes the material or service which occurs in only 11% of the challenges reported in this study. Administrators who responded to the survey indicated that challengers are very satisfied with only 18% of the outcomes of challenges.

## SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

For the first time the data analysis separated out board members as challengers from employees of school districts. Five percent of the challengers were identified as school board members. Since school boards adopt curriculum guides and textbooks, challenges to existing curriculum are probably coming from board members who were not on the board when the material was adopted or the material being challenged does not go through a board adoption process such as the selection of library books. Taken by itself this 5% challenge rate by board members is not very significant. But in light of news reports about the changing agendas of some newly elected board members, the data suggests the possibility of an emerging trend.

> *Little more than a year after sweeping into office as apostles of the "religious right's" growing political activism, Christian fundamentalists on San Diego County school boards are shaking up more than a dozen local school districts. Many of the new school board members have brought into heated debate long-standing policies.... They have objected to self-esteem programs...criticized a popular spelling curriculum called "Wizards," contending that the fairies and ogres it uses to make spelling fun promote the occult.* (Gaw, 1993, p. B1)

Quotations from board members used earlier in the report (p. 1, 9-10) indicate that the rhetorical style being used is inflammatory:

> *"Schools are teaching about Satanism, levitation, secular humanism and the occult."*
>
> *"And when you see the national output of the input that's done on a local basis, it would scare you to death."*

The data collected in this study do little more than hint at a possible trend, and it is unlikely that using a survey sent to school administrators will provide data that might be considered critical of the administrators employers--school board members.

## RELIGION

Concerns about religious conflict or satanic/witchcraft issues account for 50% of the challenges in the 1993 data. This represents an increase of nine percentage points over the data collected in 1991 and 1990. This trend is even more dramatic when compared to data collected in the 1970's when religious issues were not a major concern. These objections take on added significance because they are focused not only at single library books or a particular film, but they are focused on: (a) State adopted textbook series such as Impressions; (b) the new statewide testing system--CLAS; and (c) what the State adopted Framework says will be taught in science courses about the origins of life. Thus, if successful, the challenges will have a much wider impact than a challenge to a single library book.

As has been noted in prior reports of this research, religiously based challenges are particularly difficult for school districts. If the district agrees with the challenger, it is subject to criticism for letting the values of a particular religious group dictate public policy. On the other hand, if the district rejects the challenge, it can be criticized for being insensitive to the right of each family to practice their own religious beliefs. Since religious values and beliefs are more firmly held and less subject to compromise than many other categories of beliefs, school districts face many difficulties in trying to deal with religious challenges. Compromise, the usual mechanism for solving disputes, is difficult to achieve in these challenges.

> *Religious beliefs, democratic values, and the education of children always raise sharp differences of opinion, but when all of these three are joined together and focused on one problem, the debate really becomes...*
>
> ***fired with emotion and beset with confusion.***
>
> (Butts, 1950, p. ix)

## ECHO EFFECT

Data about the impact that contentious challenges have on decisions made by other school districts was collected for the second time in 1993. Almost all administrators report that they knew about challenges in other districts. Only 12 percent (the same amount as in the 1991 data) indicated that the challenges were handled routinely with little controversy. The vast majority of administrators reported that the challenges were contentious and disruptive. Exactly the same percentage (9%) reported in both surveys that they would be less likely to adopt or would not consider items that caused contentious challenges in other districts. Research done in the 1950's and 1980's also suggested that there is a precautionary reaction to challenges. And one respondent to this survey stated it explicitly in a note made on the questionnaire:

> *Please note that while we make independent judgements, challenges are causing us to be more conservative and take fewer risks.*

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## Appendix 1 -- Object of Challenges

**ELEMENTARY LEVEL**
A Natural History of Unnatural Things
A is for AIDS (film)
Adolescent Growth Education (curriculum guide)
Bearskin (Grimm's)
Best Witches--Poems for Halloween
Blubber
building a tool chest or hope chest (class activity)
Child of the Owl *
CTBS tests
Dare Program
Dark is Rising (film from instructional TV)
Draw 50 Besties and Yuggues...
Growing Healthy (HIV/AIDS education program)
Halloween (the holiday)
Hougthon Mifflin Social Studies series (3)
How to Catch a Ghost
How to Eat Fried Worms *
I'm Peer Proof (program by Camp Fire)
Impressions (reading series) (8)
In the Night Kitchen
Jerome and the Witchcraft Kids
Joshua in the Promised Land
Little House in the Big Wood *
More Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark
music program not "Christian" enough
pictures of four Black leaders including Malcolm X
Queen of the What Ifs
Quest Program (Skills for Growing)
Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark
Scary Stories 3: More Tales to Chill Your Bones
Sexual Change in Youth (film)
Sign of the Beaver *
Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady
Sleeping Beauty and Other Favorite Fairy Tails *
Slugs (2)
Stories California Indians Told (audio tape)
Teen Assessment Survey (AAUW)
The Boy Who Lost His Face
The Devil's Story Book
The Gnats of Knotty Pine
The Headless Cupid
Witches (4) (3 by Blumberg, 1 by Dahl)
Wizards spelling program

**ELEMENTARY/JR. HIGH LEVEL**
Bridge to Terabethia (3) *
family life curriculum
Hansel and Gretel *
Happy Birthday Little Witch
health education information/AIDS
Ichabod Crane
My Brother Sam is Dead *
Rolling Harvey Down the Hill
The Headless Horseman
The Doll House Murders

**JR. HIGH LEVEL**
Abortion (student report)
A Hero Ain't Nothing But a Sandwich *
AIDS prevention program/curriculum (2)
Beowolf, A New Telling *
Catcher in the Rye *
Go Ask Alice
Heart Talks
Houghton Mifflin Social Studies series
Human Growth and Development
I Know What You Did Last Summer
Islam (interact)
Kindergarten Cop (rented video)
Literature and World Masterpieces
Lord of the Flies *
Meet With Witches
Occult Visions
Quest program (2)
Romeo and Juliet (1967 video)
Science Series by Prentice Hall
Smart Choices
The AIDS Afternoon Special (TV film)
The Bronze Bow (2)
The Cay (3) *
The Devils Footprint (SRA Listening Lab)
The Halloween Tree
The Last Mission
Tom Sawyer *
Witchcraft in America
Witches

**HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL**
AIDS education (2)
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The *
Aztec
Birdy
Bless Me Ultima *
Brave New World *
Chiquita's Cocoon
Christmas music
Cybil (film)
family life materials
Fighting Invisible Tigers
Frieda (art video)
Full Circle
Go Ask Alice
health course
How to Help Your Kids Say No to Sex (author Focus on the Family/curriculum guide)
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (3) *
La Boem (film)
Misery
Moves Make the Man
mythology materials
Night Kites
Of Mice and Men (2) *
Ordinary People *
Pageant of World History
Planned Parenthood (presentation)
Prelude to a Kiss (drama production)
Rosemary's Baby
The Great Santini
The Lottery *
To Kill a Mocking Bird *

**ALL LEVELS**
district health clinic
State tests/ CLAS tests (2)
science curriculum

Numbers represent the number of districts reporting that an item was challenged if it is over one.

* Indicates that the book is listed by the State Department of Education in Recommended Literature 9-12 or Recommended Reading in Literature K-8.



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**Groups Identified by the Challengers as Supporters or Participants in the Challenges**

ACLU (2)
AAUW
American Indian Commission
Anti Defamation League
Benjamin Bull, Miss.
Catholic church
Christian church group
Christian right church
CEE (2)
Citizens for a Safe School Campus
coalition of several church groups (2)
concerned Christians
Creationists
CVE
Dr. Dobson/Christian coalition (2)
Eagle Forum (2)
Excellence in Education
Focus on Family (2)
fundamentalist church/groups (3)
HCAC
Jewish Defense League
Jewish Community
local church
members of the same church
Moslems
NAACP (2)
Native Americans
NOW
NRA
Patterson, Dr. Colin
Robertson, Pat
religious community (Baptist)
religious right (2)
Schuller
Seventh Day Adventist minister
Vineyard Church

**Challengers Referred to Arguments Developed by These Groups/People**

ACLU (2)
Anti Defamation League (2)
Coulson, William R.
CURE
Dobson (2)
Education Code
Focus on the Family (3)
NAACP
NOW
Patterson, Dr. Colin
religious fundamentalists (2)
religions
Robertson, Pat
Schafley, Phyllis
San Marcos School District
Schuller
Southern California fundamentalist group
Vista School District
white supremists group
unknown religious organization

Numbers represent the number of districts giving this response.

## PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES FOR THOSE WHO DEAL WITH CHALLENGES

American Association of School Administrators, 1801 N. Moore Street, Arlington, VA 22209.
Published by AASA: Religion in the Public Schools (1986).

American Library Association,
Office of Intellectual Freedom, (312) 944-6780,
Publishes: Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom bimonthly.

The Association for Library Services to Children, a division of ALA provides a packet of materials on "Intellectual Freedom for Children."

Association of California School Administrators, (415) 692-4300, Joseph Jones 1575 Old Bayshore, Buringame, CA 94010.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 125 N. West Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-2798, (703) 549-9110.
Published by ASCD: Religion in the Curriculum (1987).

California School Boards Association, Policy Service, (916) 371-4691.

International Reading Association, (302) 731-1600 x 214, fax (302) 731-1057.
Provides a packet of material on textbook and reading program censorship.

National Council of Teachers of English (217) 328-3870 offers support in censorship incidents.

National Education Association (202) 833-4000 offers crisis assistance to members.
Published by NEA: Academic Freedom to Teach and to Learn: Every Teachers Issue (1990) Anna S. Ochoa, Editor.

National Organization on Legal Problems in Education, Southwest Plaza Building, 3601 SW 29th St., #223, Topeka, KS 66614, (913) 273-3550, fax (913) 273-2001.
Published by NOLPE: Free Expression and Censorship (1988) Mawdsley, A Legal Guide to Religion and Public Education (1988) Sendor.

Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, PO Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789, (812) 339-1156.
Published by PDK: A Delicate Balance: Church, State, and the Schools (1983), McCarthy; The Schoolbook Protest Movement (1986) Jenkinson.

# CSBA Sample
## Board Policy

**Community Relations** BP 1312.2(a)

**COMPLAINTS CONCERNING INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS**

The Governing Board takes great care in the adoption of instructional materials and is aware that all adopted materials may not be acceptable to all students, their parents/guardians, or other district residents.

*(cf. 6161.1 - Selection and Evaluation of Instructional Materials)*
*(cf. 6161.11 - Supplementary Instructional Materials)*

The Superintendent or designee shall establish procedures which will permit proper consideration of any complaints against the use of any instructional materials, including textbooks, supplementary textbooks, library books, and other instructional materials and equipment.

The Board believes the Superintendent and staff are well qualified to consider complaints concerning instructional materials. Complainants are advised to consider and accept the Superintendent or designee's decision as final. However, if the complainant finds the decision of the Superintendent or designee unsatisfactory, he/she may request that the matter be placed on the agenda of a regular Board meeting.

*(cf. 1312.3 - Uniform Complaint Procedures)*

The Board's decision in any such case will be based on educational suitability and will not be influenced by a desire to suppress information or deny students access to ideas with which the Board disagrees.

*(cf. 6144 - Controversial Issues)*

*Legal Reference: (See next page)*

**COMPLAINTS CONCERNING INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS** (continued)

*Legal Reference:*
*EDUCATION CODE*
*18111 Exclusion of books by governing board*
*35010 Control of district; prescription and enforcement of rules*
*60003 Power of governing board to select instructional materials*
*60040-60047 Content requirements for instructional materials*
*60200-60206 Elementary school material - selection and adoption*
*60260 Legislative intent for ordering instructional materials*
*60262 Involvement of teachers, parents and community in instructional material selection*
*60400-60404 Secondary school textbooks - selection and adoption*

*Management Resources:*
*PROGRAM ADVISORY*
*1002.90 Selection of instructional materials, CIL: 90/91-02*

(1/85 6/85 5/86 9/88) 12/90


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# CSBA Sample
## Administrative Regulation

**Community Relations** AR 1312.2(a)

**COMPLAINTS CONCERNING INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS**

Note: The following regulation provides procedures for receiving, considering and acting upon complaints regarding instructional materials used by the district. All parts of the regulation, including specified timelines, may be modified as desired to reflect district practice.

Complaints concerning instructional materials will be accepted only from staff, district residents, or the parents/guardians of children enrolled in a district school.

Complaints must be presented in writing to the principal. Complaints regarding printed material must name the author, title and publisher, and identify the objection by page and item numbers. In the case of nonprinted material, written information specifying the precise nature of the objection shall be given. The statement must be signed and identified in such a way that a proper reply will be possible.

Individual students may be excused from using challenged materials after the parent/guardian has presented a written complaint. The teacher will then assign the student alternate materials of equal merit. Use of the materials by a class, school or the district, however, shall not be restricted until so directed by the Superintendent or designee.

Upon receiving a complaint, the principal will acknowledge its receipt and answer any questions regarding procedure. The principal will then notify the Superintendent or designee and the teacher(s) involved of the complaint. The Superintendent or designee will determine whether the complaint should be considered on an individual basis or whether a review committee should be convened.

The use of challenged materials by class, school or district shall not be restricted until final disposition has been made by the appropriate review committee.

A review committee may be formed under the direction of the Superintendent or designee. It shall be composed of the principal and five or more staff members selected by the Superintendent or designee from relevant administrative and instructional areas.

**COMPLAINTS CONCERNING INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS** (continued)

In deliberating challenged materials, the review committee shall consider the educational philosophy of the district; the professional opinions of other teachers of the subject and of other competent authorities; reviews of the materials by reputable bodies; the teacher's stated objectives in using the materials; and the objections of the complainant.

The review committee shall determine the extent to which the challenged material supports the curriculum, the educational appropriateness of the material, and its suitability for the age level of the student.

Within 30 days of being convened, the review committee shall summarize its findings in a written report and submit it to the Superintendent or designee for final action. The Superintendent or designee shall notify the complainant of his/her decision no later than 60 days after the complaint was filed.

The report of the review committee together with the Superintendent or designee's recommendation may be brought to the Governing Board for consideration and final decision.

Note: The following optional paragraph limits reconsideration within a specified time period, as suggested by the CDE in Program Advisory CIL: 90/91-02. The 12-month timeline is a CSBA suggestion and may be modified as desired.

When any challenged instructional material is reviewed by the district, it shall not be subject to any additional reconsideration for 12 months.

**County or State-Adopted Material**

If the challenged material has been adopted by the County Board of Education, the Superintendent or designee may forward the complaint, without action, to the office of the County Superintendent of Schools for reevaluation and decision.

If the questioned material has been adopted by the State of California, the Superintendent or designee may forward the complaint, without action, to the California Department of Education for reevaluation and decision.



**Policy Reference UPDATE Service**
**California School Boards Association**
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# CSBA Sample
## Exhibit

E 1312.2

**CITIZEN'S REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS**

Date: _____

TITLE: _____

AUTHOR: _____

PUBLISHER: _____ DATE OF EDITION: _____

Request received by: _____ Title: _____

Citizen's Name: _____ Phone: _____

Citizen Represents:
Himself/Herself: _____ Organization or Group: _____

1. To what do you object? (Please be specific: cite pages, tape sequence, video frame, and words)

2. What do you feel would be the result of reading/viewing this material?

3. For what age group would you recommend this material?

4. Did you read/view the entire selection?

5. If not, what percentage did you read/view, or what parts?

6. Is there anything good about this material?

7. What would you like the school to do about this material?
   - ❒ Do not assign it to my child.
   - ❒ Withdraw it from all students.
   - ❒ Reevaluate it.

8. Are you aware of how this work has been assessed by literary critics?

9. What do you believe is the thesis of this work?

10. In its place, what work would you recommend?

_____
Signature of citizen

Action taken: _____ Date: _____

12/90

**Policy Reference UPDATE Service**
**California School Boards Association**
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Educational Congress of California
c/o California School Employees Association • 1127 11th Street • Sacramento, CA 95814

**Board of Directors:**

American Association of University Women, CA Div.

Association of California Urban School Districts

Association of Low Wealth Schools

Association of Mexican-American Educators, Inc.

California Association of Administrators of State and Federal Education Programs

California Association for the Gifted

California Association of School Business Officials

California Association of School Transportation Officials

California Federation of Teachers AFL-CIO

California Media and Library Educators Association

California School Boards Association

California School Counselor Association

California School Employees Association

California School Nurses Organization

California State Parents, Teachers and Students Association

California Teachers Association

Delta Kappa Gamma Society, Chi State-California

League of Woman Voters of California

Schools for Sound Finance

Service Employees International Union, AFL-CIO,CLC

**Board of Directors Chairman**
Florence B. McAuley

Dear Superintendent:

As you are aware the news media has had many stories of late about challenges from special interest groups (political, religious and environmental, etc.) to curriculum materials or pupil services. The Educational Congress of California is also concerned about these issues.

This is the third statewide survey to determine the extent and nature of the challenges. Repeating the survey is important in gathering trend data. Each of our twenty constituent organizations will use these data in staff development and public information programs. Copies of the report will be made available to participating districts. For copies of last year's report please send a check in the amount of $5.00, or $2.00 for the Executive Summary to: ECC Report, 130 Bolla Ave., Alamo, CA 94507.

The accuracy of the picture presented by these data depends on your timely response. We want to assure you that these data will be reported in aggregate form. At no time will your district be individually identified. We are asking you to list your district name on the survey forms only so that we can contact districts that do not respond to the initial survey.

We want to thank you in advance for your assistance in this important research. If you have questions about the research or forms, you can call Dr. Louise Adler (714) 773-3911, Assistant Professor of Educational Administration, California State University, Fullerton, who is coordinating the research for ECC; or Florence McAuley, (515) 837-9565, Chairperson of ECC.

Sincerely,

Florence B McAuley

Florence McAuley,
Chairperson



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California State University, Fullerton
Louise Adler, EC552, Educational Administration
Fullerton, CA 92634-6000 • (714)773-3911

# DISTRICT REPORT

Please return as soon as possible!

District_____ County_____

Address_____ Phone ( )_____

ADA#_____ Type of District: K-6/8 ☐ K-12 ☐ High School ☐

Title of Person Reporting_____ Date_____

**GENERAL INFORMATION:**

1. Has your school district **ever** had a challenge to the use of curriculum materials or pupil service?

   ☐ Not to my knowledge ☐ Yes

2. Does it seem to you that your district is experiencing (check one of the following):

   ☐ The same number of challenges as in past years, or

   ☐ More challenges than in past years,

   ☐ Fewer challenges than in past years?

3. For the **last two school years** has your district received any challenges to curriculum and/or pupil/student services **(1991-92 and 1992-93)**?

   ☐ No (if no, please skip to #6)
   ☐ Yes, how many? Total # _____(If yes, please fill in blue Challenge Report.)

4. How many challenges have there been to each type of material or service during 1991-92 & 1992-93? (Place the appropriate number in the box.)

   ☐ Textbook ☐ Film ☐ Library Book

   ☐ Curriculum Guide ☐ Class Discussion/Lecture

   ☐ Counselor Services ☐ School Nurse ☐ Psychologist

   ☐ Other:_____

5. What was the most common reason(s) for the challenge(s) during the last two school years? (Check those that apply.)

- ☐ Controversial
- ☐ Religious conflict
- ☐ Satanic/witchcraft
- ☐ Out of date
- ☐ Violence
- ☐ Not age appropriate
- ☐ Offensive to minorities
- ☐ Sexually explicit
- ☐ Poor role model
- ☐ Profanity
- ☐ Other:_____

**POLICY:**

6. Does your district have a written policy for dealing with challenges?

☐ No ☐ Yes (Please send a copy of the policy with this form.)

7. If you do not have a policy, do you intend to develop a policy?

☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Does not apply, we have a policy.

8. Has your district used the challenge policy?

- ☐ Not applicable, we have no policy.
- ☐ No, we have had no challenges.
- ☐ No, we have had challenges but did not use the policy.
- ☐ Yes, we have had challenges and used the policy.

9. When was the policy last reviewed or revised?

☐ Within the last 2 years, ☐ Within the last 5 years, ☐ Neither

**CHALLENGES IN OTHER DISTRICTS:**

10. Have you read or heard about challenges in other districts?

☐ No ☐ Yes

11. How would you characterize what you remember hearing about these challenges in other districts? (Check appropriate answers.)

- ☐ Challenges were handled routinely with little controversy.
- ☐ Challenges were somewhat contentious and disruptive.
- ☐ Challenges were very disruptive.
- ☐ Challenges caused community wide controversy.
- ☐ Other:_____

35



over

12. When you consider new curriculum and/or services for your district, how are you influenced by what you have heard about challenges?
(Check the one box that reflects how you think your district would respond.)

- ☐ We are not influenced at all.
- ☐ We plan the adoption process carefully to avoid controversies, but we make our own independent judgement.
- ☐ We would consider items challenged elsewhere, but it would be less likely we would adopt them.
- ☐ We might not consider items known to have caused contentious challenges in other districts.
- ☐ We would not consider adopting curriculum and/or services that caused contentious challenges in other districts.

(Please send copies of your policy for dealing with challenges and any other documents from your district such as the challenge forms.)

California State University, Fullerton
Louise Adler, EC552, Educational Administration
Fullerton, CA 92634-6000 • (714)773-3911

## CHALLENGE REPORT FORM_____DISTRICT

Give district name.

Please fill out one form for each separate challenge. Two forms are provided. A photo copy can be made if there were more challenges. This information is very important for comparison to challenges in prior years.

1. The approximate date of the first report of the challenge_____.
   **Report data for the 1991-92 and 1992-93 school years only!**

2. The site of the challenge: ☐ Elementary, ☐ Jr. High/Middle, ☐ High School.

**WHAT:**

3. What was the type of material or service challenged?
   - ☐ Textbook
   - ☐ Film
   - ☐ Class Discussion/Lecture
   - ☐ Library Books
   - ☐ Curriculum Guide
   - ☐ Psychologist
   - ☐ Counselor Services
   - ☐ School Nurse
   - ☐ Other:_____

4. For challenged material, what is the:

   Title/name_____

   Author/provider_____

5. Is this material adopted by: ☐ State Board of Education, ☐ Local school board, ☐ Neither

**WHO:**

6. Who were (are) the challengers? (Check all appropriate categories.)
   - ☐ Parents
   - ☐ Religious group
   - ☐ Special interest group
   - ☐ Community members
   - ☐ Non residents
   - ☐ Teacher
   - ☐ Board member
   - ☐ Principal
   - ☐ District office staff
   - ☐ Other employee

7. How many people made the initial challenge? #_____

8. How many people supported the challenge in writing or at a meeting? _____ (approx. #)

9. Were any of the challengers/supporters not residents of your district? ☐ No, ☐ Yes, how many?_____

10. Has this person(s) challenged school practices or materials in the past?

    ☐ No ☐ Yes, Please identify approximate date and subject of challenge:

    _____

11. Has any organized group been identified by the challenger(s) as supporters or participants in the challenge?

    ☐ No ☐ Yes Please identify the group(s):_____

12. Did the person(s) challenging the material refer to arguments or viewpoints developed by individuals or groups from outside the community?

    ☐ No, ☐ Not sure, ☐ Yes, Please identify:_____

**WHY:**

13. What was the stated reason for the challenge? (Check those that apply.)

- ☐ Controversial
- ☐ Religious conflict
- ☐ Satanic/witchcraft
- ☐ Out of date
- ☐ Violence
- ☐ Not age appropriate
- ☐ Offensive to minorities
- ☐ Sexually explicit
- ☐ Poor role model
- ☐ Profanity
- ☐ Other:_____

14. What did the challenger ask the school district to do when the challenge originated?

- ☐ Excuse their child from using the material or service
- ☐ Restrict use of the material or service
- ☐ Revise or edit out "objectionable" sections
- ☐ Completely end use of the material or service

**DEALING WITH THE CHALLENGE:**

15. Has the challenge been covered by the media? ☐ No, ☐ Yes (Please attach copies.)

16. Has the challenge been discussed at a public board meeting? ☐ No, ☐ Yes (Please attach minutes.)

17. Has the district contacted an attorney regarding the challenge? ☐ No, ☐ Yes

18. What steps have been taken to date to respond to the challenge? (Check those appropriate.)

- ☐ Staff has met with challengers
- ☐ Staff has requested the challengers put their concerns in writing
- ☐ Challengers have received a written response (Please attach a copy.)
- ☐ District formed a review committee

19. At what level was the final decision on how to deal with the challenge made?

☐ School site, ☐ District office, ☐ School board

**RESULT:**

20. The final decision made was: (Check those appropriate.)

- ☐ To remove the challenged material or end the services
- ☐ To restrict use of the challenged material or service (Please give details):

  _____

- ☐ To use the challenged material or service
- ☐ To use the materials or service, but excuse the children of the challenger(s) from use of the material
- ☐ Other:_____

21. In your opinion what would challengers say about the outcome you have described above? (More than one can be checked.)

- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Got a fair hearing/but don't like the outcome
- ☐ No one really listened/nothing changed/but district was nice
- ☐ Were treated badly/don't like the outcome
- ☐ We'll be back
- ☐ We're taking our kids out of school
- ☐ See you at the next election
- ☐ Other:_____





22. How satisfied do you think the challengers were with the outcome?

☐ Very Satisfied, ☐ Somewhat Satisfied, ☐ Somewhat Dissatisfied, ☐ Very Dissatisfied

*A Coalition of Organizations Interested in Quality Education*

# EDUCATIONAL CONGRESS OF CALIFORNIA

The Educational Congress of California, organized in 1972, is an independent coalition of statewide groups both community-based and professional who have an interest in public education.

The Congress provides a forum for the discussion and dissemination of timely information which relates to K-12 education.

A primary interest of the coalition is to improve communication and broaden the perspective of member organizations. ECC serves as a vehicle to build understanding and trust.

School finance and the issues which have impact on policy as it relates to finance are presented, discussed and disseminated to the two million constituent members. Common interest and goals are established in order to speak as a united voice on issues either pending in the legislature or before the voters of California.

| | |
|---|---|
| Chairman: | **Florence McAuley** |
| Assistant Chairman: | **Joel Schaffer** |
| Secretary: | **Atha Jane Hayward** |
| Treasurer: | **Carol Boyer** |

Member Organizations

Association of California School Administrators
Association of California Urban School Districts
Association of Low Wealth Schools
Association of Mexican-American Educators
California Association of Administrators of State & Federal Education Programs
California Association of the Gifted
California Association of School Business Officials
California Association of School Psychologists
California Association of School Transportation Officials
California Media & Library Educators Association
California School Boards Association
California School Counselors Association
California School Employees Association
California School Nurses Organization
California State Parents, Teachers & Students Association
California Teachers Association
Delta Kappa Gamma Society, Chi State-California
League of Women Voters of California
Schools for Sound Finance
Service Employees International Union,AFL,CIO,CLC